

Top Tips for Using Time Out

Explain Time Out to Your Toddler

Before starting time out sit down with your toddler and explain how time out will work and which behaviours will earn time out – as a general rule, use time out for safety-based behaviours (e.g. hitting, biting, etc.). Try to stick to a single rule – for example, keep your hands and feet to yourself, no throwing, etc. Toddlers will find it difficult to remember more than one rule. As a general rule, time out should be 1 minute for younger toddlers and 2 minutes for 3-4 year olds.

Reward Positive Behaviour

Balancing positive and negative attention is key to successful behaviour management. Focusing on problem behaviour without rewarding positive behaviour can actually *increase* or at least maintain challenging behaviour. Make sure you take time to catch your child being good.

Respond Immediately

When the problem behaviour occurs immediately stop what you're doing and gain your child's attention – say their name and make sure they're looking at you and listening to what you're saying. In a calm, clear voice firmly tell your child to stop what they're doing and describe the alternative behaviour – "Alex, stop hitting your brother now. Keep your hands and feet to yourself"

Monitor Compliance Closely

If your child complies with your request, give plenty of praise. If your child doesn't comply or if the behaviour occurs again in the next 30-minutes, follow through with time out – "Alex you haven't stopped hitting your brother like I asked so now you must go to time out"

Give Minimal Attention

Refrain from lecturing or threatening – actions speak louder than words. If your child refuses to go to time out, firmly but calmly guide him/her to the time out area. Ignore any protests. If your child leaves time out, return them without speaking. You will probably need to repeat this step a numerous times when you first start time out.

Catch Your Child Being Good

Avoid discussing the incident immediately after time out. Allow your child to rejoin the activity and watch them closely for an opportunity to praise behaviour.

Be Consistent

Once you've explained which behaviours will earn time out, time out needs to be applied every time the behaviour occurs. If you're out, try to still follow through with time out. Sit next to your child on a bench (without speaking) and have time out.

Time Out

When your child misbehaves, one of the best ways to nip the behaviour in the bud is to remove your child from the activity at hand to give him or her a chance to calm down. This strategy is known as time out.

Time out helps kids to learn the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and it can be used with children as young as two. It removes the need for lengthy conversation about behaviour which is advantageous because:

- Young children may find lengthy conversations hard to process
- Kids don't differentiate between positive and negative attention and lengthy conversations can inadvertently reinforce problem behaviour

As effective as time out is, it shouldn't be used in isolation. If your child is whining or crying he or she is probably frustrated. In this case helping your child to develop the skills they need to manage frustration will be far more effective than a time out.

This tips sheet provides information on how to use time out effectively. If your child's problem behaviour continues it may be because their behaviour is the result of lagging skills in the areas of:

- Frustration tolerance
- Emotion regulation skills
- Communication skills
- Flexible thinking

If behaviour doesn't improve, seek the advice of a child clinical psychologist.